

\*USAF Declass/Release Instructions On File\*

HEADQUARTERS PANAMA CANAL DEPARTMENT  
Office of the Joint Staff

Quarry Heights, C. Z.  
14 January 1947

AIR - LAND - SEA  
SEARCH AND RECOVERY OPERATIONS  
IN  
THE PANAMA COASTAL FRONTIER

STANDING OPERATING PROCEDURE

FOR

REQUESTING ASSISTANCE

1. Inform the Commanding General, Panama Canal Department, attention Chief, Joint Command Post, Quarry Heights, Canal Zone, when it becomes apparent that an aircraft or surface craft is unreasonably overdue.
2. Give the last known position of the plane or ship in latitude and longitude. If local names are considered beneficial, include them but do not omit the latitude and longitude.
3. Give as many details as can be secured as to flight plan of the plane or the projected course of the vessel, and, if possible, include a report on the weather conditions.
4. Advise the Government of the country to which you are assigned to make an official request through diplomatic channels for the forces of the Panama Coastal Frontier to participate, or state in the first communication that a specific request will follow.
5. Describe any special means of communication that can be used.
6. State whether it would be desirable to have a liaison officer from this command report to you.
7. Tell what has been done locally:
  - a. Have the adjacent air strips and ports been checked?
  - b. Have the local representatives of the international air lines been contacted?
  - c. Have the local planes started searching? If so, what areas are they searching?
  - d. Other pertinent information.
8. Have all messages, requests, reports, etc., ~~been~~ channeled through your office.

## SEARCH AND RESCUE PROCEDURES

### Searching Procedures:

Search and Rescue Operations are controlled by the Director, Aircraft Control and Warning Center located in Bombproof, Quarry Heights.

This organization has available an extensive network of communications.

When a search is started, the most probable areas will be searched first; all landing fields that could have been used, even the auxiliary fields, will be checked. However, if a well-based report is received that distress signals, etc., have been sighted in any area, the searching planes or craft will be diverted at once to investigate. Once a search is started, every report may be helpful but they must be screened so that the organized search will not be disrupted any more than necessary.

The equipment that is best suited to search the particular areas will be selected at the control center, viz., PBM's or PV-2's are used for water areas while slow flying land planes are used to search the land areas. In this connection, if a crash occurs in an area of high altitudes above 7,000', the L-1 type aircraft cannot be used.

When survivors are sighted in the water, the following procedure is followed:

- a. The position is reported at once and markers are dropped by the plane.
- b. Emergency equipment, such as life rafts, will be dropped.
- c. Any surface vessel in the vicinity may be called upon to assist in the rescue. The following is the method of signalling that is used.

The aircraft shall establish identification if possible. It shall then circle the ship at least once, fly across the bow of the ship at a low altitude, opening and closing the throttle and/or changing the propeller pitch, and will head in the direction of the distress scene, rocking its wings. This procedure will be repeated until the ship has acknowledged by following the aircraft. If possible, the aircraft shall maintain visual contact with the ship until the latter sights the plane or ship in distress or the survivors thereof.

- d. If the survivors are sighted on land, emergency equipment and supplies will be dropped to them, and they will be told, normally, to wait near the scene until the ground rescue party reaches them.

Rescue Procedures:

If the survivors are in off-shore waters, the recovery will be accomplished in accordance with the following priorities:

- a. By surface craft.
- b. By the use of droppable equipment.
- c. By an aircraft landing at sea. (Note: Off-shore landings by rescue aircraft will not normally be made when the rescue or the rendering of assistance can be successfully accomplished by any other means without unduly jeopardizing the lives of the persons in distress.)
- d. If the survivors are in the jungle, special methods of guiding ground rescue parties will be employed.
- e. After all search and recovery activities are conducted, a report will be furnished to the Military Attache of the country requesting the search.
- f. Listed for your information are special instructions, which, if published by commercial or governmental agencies, would greatly assist rescue operations:
  - (1) Terrain information, indicating lack of roads and trails in this area.
  - (2) It should be made clear that it is almost impossible to go alone from the scene of a crash to a center of population, and that it is much better to stay near the scene of the crash and await the rescue party rather than to attempt to get out of the mountains or jungle alone.

Included is a special suggestion that could be made to the government of the country to which you are accredited. Have all life rafts that are used for pleasure or sporting activities painted with black and white diagonal stripes. This suggestion is made because the increased use of former ditching equipment by bathers and hunters has permitted many of these rafts to float in the open sea. Not only have pilots wasted time looking at them but actual deaths have resulted by pilots attempting to go down for them.

INFORMATION DESIRED FOR AIR-LAND-SEA RESCUE FILES

1. The best available maps of your area on which is shown as much of the following information as possible:

- a. Roads.
- b. Main trails.
- c. Railroads.
- d. Airfields. (Especially the auxiliary airfields.)
- e. The populated areas that can be reached by telephone, telegraph and radio.
- f. Outstanding terrain features.
- g. Streams that can be navigated by small craft.
- h. Location of hospitals to which critically ill or seriously injured rescues may be taken, or to which a surface ship with a critically ill or injured personnel aboard could be diverted.

2. The address to be used for communication with you or members of your staff.

3. A description of the area covered by:

- a. Local air routes.
- b. Local shipping lanes.

4. Photographs of airfields and any other pictures, etc., that you consider would be helpful.

5. The facilities that would be at your disposal for the conducting of an air-land-sea rescue, such as the number and type of aircraft available, number of men available, communication equipment available, (especially the type that can be used for air to ground communications).

6. Can pamphlets be prepared for distribution by air to the villages and population centers which cannot be reached by normal communications?

7. Can meteorological service be provided?

8. What air lines operate in the country to which you are assigned?